FROM THE OUTPOSTS

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Cullen Gouldsbury

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FROM THE OUTPOSTS

SONGS OUT OF EXILE

By CULLEN GOULDSBURY

Crown 8vo, cloth. *3s. 6d. net*

"Mr. Gouldsbury has done for South Africa what Lindsay Gordon did for Australia. He writes verse that will hold the Plain Man."—*Graphic.*

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Daily Telegraph.

FROM THE OUTPOSTS

BY

CULLÈN GOULDSBURY

AUTHOR OF "SONGS OUT OF EXILE"

61063
a C.

T. FISHER UNWIN
1 ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON

61063.

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CONTENTS

PAGE

TO ENGLAND, FROM THE OUTPOSTS . . . 11

BUSH BALLADS

THE CARAVAN 25

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT 28

ON THE ROAD 30

HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT 32

THE ADMINISTRATORS 35

THE MAGIC PLAINS 38

THE "CHISANGUKA" 40

THE BUCCANEERS 43

THE MWAVI TREE 45

CHUNGU ON PROGRESS 47

ON THE MOVE 49

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T GO HOME . . . 52

THE BACHELOR'S DOG 55

PAGE

TO THE GIRL WHO WOULDN'T COME . . . 58

ON THE VERANDAH 60

THE OLD STORY 62

BEFORE DAWN 64

THE COUNCILLOR 66

TWO SONGS FROM THE MASHONA—

I. AFRICAN SLUMBER SONG 69

II. AFRICAN LOVE SONG 70

RETROSPECT 72

IN THE SMOKE 74

GRAVES OF THE NORTH 76

A RIDDLE OF ROADS 78

THEN AND NOW 80

THE PIONEERS 81

AN OPEN LETTER 83

BUSH MADRIGAL 86

TO AN OLD RIFLE 88

GOBLIN GOLD 91

A BALLAD IN SEASON 94

AFRICAN AUTHORS 96

PAGE

THE LAMENT OF ABDULLAH-BIN-SULIMAN . . 98

THE CROCODILE KINGS 101

THE PRICE OF EMPIRE 104

RHODES'S DREAM 107

NIGER, SED PULCHERRIMUS 109

A SONG OF PRAISE 112

POINTS OF VIEW 114

"RATION B" 117

TO MOTHER AFRICA 121

TO ENGLAND, FROM THE OUTPOSTS

TO ENGLAND, FROM THE OUTPOSTS

I

We have borne the heat and the burden
For many a weary year,
Asking nor wreath nor guerdon,
Nor even words of cheer;
Knowing our work lies here,
We have toiled without regret—
Have you forgotten us, Mother? or are
we your children yet?

II

Some of us hold your borders
In sullen, sun-baked lands,
Where savage, swift marauders
Breed in the burning sands;
Your Honour lies in our hands
To guard or trail in the dust—
Have your forgotten, Mother, the men
that you placed in trust?

III

From Africa unto China,
From Quebec to far Malay,
Your battleship and your liner
Have heavy debts to pay!
'Tis *we* who make safe the way,
Guard each link of the chain—
Send us a message, Mother, ere
you turn to sleep again!

IV

Remember the men who mattered
In the dim, forgotten past!
The men who, riddled and shattered,
Won you your lands at last,
When the skies were overcast
And the storm was near to break—
Remember your children, Mother, who
died for England's sake.

V

Your cities are bravely builded,
Your palaces nobly planned,
Marble-pillared, and gilded,
And set in a smiling land,

. . . But the world was tamed to your hand
Back in the stormy years—
Your stateliest jewels, Mother, are
the graves of your pioneers!

VI

There is still the strain within you!
Rise, ere the time be past,
Trust the men who can win you
Honour unto the last.
(Drake has bowed to the blast,
Nelson and Clive are dead,
But the God of Battles gave you Scott
and his men instead.)

VII

By the banks of the old, grey river
Still stand your Council Halls,
But your Wise Men sit and shiver
Within their storied walls;
Scorning the bitter calls
Of men on the Frontier Line—
There's a wider Empire, Mother, than
lies 'twixt Channel and Tyne!

VIII

Is Honour dead in your borders?
Are your children sold to shame?
Shall we cringe to alien orders
And forget our Island's name?
Shall we douse the flickering flame
That has lit you down the years?—
Nay! it shall burn more brightly, an
you trust your pioneers!

IX

A truce to the sleek attorneys
That ring you snugly round—
Send them on Empire-journeys
To wider, cleaner ground!
You are fettered fast, and bound
In the snares of a slavish clan
That prate of a "Little England" built
on a pigmy plan.

X

Drive your youth from the city
From squalor and disease—
In wide, foreseeing pity
Hound them across the seas,

Lest the taint spread out from these
And you find, when the War Drum beats,
Only your football critics left to
guard your London streets.

XI

For your men are bleached and bleary,
Your women are half-distraught,
Your statesmen are squabble-weary
With plans that come to naught;
You have made a God of your Sport,
Forgotten Work for the Game,
While the Nations hover hawk-like,
profiting by your shame.

XII

Your youths set fashions in collars,
Are learned in ties and socks,
Your maidens marry for dollars,
And barter their souls for frocks;
You're drifting straight for the rocks
Where the Ship of Rome went down—
Can you breed us *soldiers*, Mother, from
the harlot and the clown?

XIII

In veld and jungle and prairie,
In desert and dim lagoon,
There are men wide-eyed and wary
To guard you while you swoon;
But, though it be yet high noon,
The vultures hover nigh—
Pass the word to your Outposts, while
they're but specks in the sky.

XIV

Is there no Knight of the Garter
To shield you from disdain?
Must you, then, stoop to barter
And kiss the dust again?
Nay! Villages of the Plain
And hordes of Hindostan
Would rise to guard you, Mother, could
you but find the Man.

XV

Shall they grind us down with the harrow,
Digging us into the dust,
While British bones and marrow
Are faithful to their trust?

We will perish if we must,
But rather in sheets of flame
Than yielding to Those Others the
glory of our name.

XVI

Out in your wider spaces
Beyond the farther seas
Your million vassal-races
Would bring Them to Their knees—
Must they, for England's ease,
Forswear the vows they gave?
Give them the choice, dear Mother!
dishonour, or the grave.

XVII

What! for threescore of counties
And thrice a hundred towns
Must *we* cringe to their bounties
And bow to foreign clowns?
The White Cliffs and the Downs
Are dear to us indeed,
But your wider Empire, Mother, has
still a wider need!

XVIII

Think of the wives who languish
In swamp and veld and vlei,
Who bear their babes in anguish
Ten thousand miles away!
Those are the ones, to-day,
Who earn the martyr's crown,
Not hammer-flinging harpies in a
humdrum English town.

XIX

They do not quake at the issue
In heathen lands afar—
They are made of finer tissue
Than your high-born ladies are!
And still the steady star
Shines out, and holds them true
To the crowning needs of England, to
their husbands and to you.

XX

They serve you in silence gaily,
Whole-hearted and serene,
Watching their youth die daily
Into the Might-Have-Been,

Scorning the seas between
To share their husbands' place,
Your Women of the Outposts are the
Mothers of the Race!

XXI

What of the babes they're bearing
In lands of sullen heat
Tenderly, 'gladly daring
To lay them at your feet;
Giving boys to the Fleet
And girls as soldiers' wives,
Paying their debt to England in
tiny human lives?

* * * * —

XXII

Back in the Halls of Pleasure
The years are clattering down,
Languid ladies of leisure
Ogling fops of the town . . .
The cost of a silken gown
Would build a desert-road . . .
But who knows aught of the Outposts, or
cares for the frontier-load?

XXIII

Grimly, wearily building
Out in the wilds are we
While these, at Home, are gilding
Lilies for men to see,
Feasting in vapid glee,
Scattering gold in the breeze
(Men run African Districts for
the price of a Pekinese).

XXIV

Blind and deaf to their function,
Asking nor "How?" nor "Why?"
They scan the news with unction
And raise their parrot-cry,
"Look ye, the years go by
And England's unprepared . . . !"
Till the markets claim their wits again,
with nothing done or dared.

XXV

A truce to the windy vapours!
A truce to the babbling lips!
If the Fool must cut his capers
Do you take heed to your ships!

Set vessels upon the slips
Against the bitter day
When the Babbler's words will falter, and
the Fool's fat cheeks be grey.

XXVI

Ours is the wider vision
Under an alien sky;
We know the sleek derision
Of the Nations slinking by!
We are glad enough to die
Unnoted and unknown
So be we guard your Honour—for
your Honour is our own.

XXVII

Cast out the smooth-mouthed traitor,
Cast out the prating fool,
Cast out the speculator
Who plots against your rule—
Trust to the simpler school
Of the men who love your name,
And, if you prize us, Mother, spare
us eternal shame!

XXVIII

Think of the lonely stations
That hem your borders round!
In the history of the nations
Each spot is holy ground!
Would you have your Wardens bound
By coward traitor-hands?
Shame upon "Little England" while
Greater England stands!

BUSH BALLADS

THE CARAVAN

FIFTY or sixty heathen souls with half a hundred loads—
A gibbering, dusky throng that rolls along the Northern Roads—
A tattered hammock, and the rest—we know it, stick and stone,
We who have left the pleasant West in yearning for our own.

The London streets lie far behind, the London lights are dim—
Our comrades here are Heathen Kind, who chant the Heathen's Hymn,
And moonlit camp, and sunlit joy, and stubborn sable clay
Replace the Carlton and Savoy—alack and well-a-day!

Feathery bush and tufted grass, and silver mists of morn,
And smouldering fires when we pass the camping-place at dawn,
And silent beasts that prowl at night and slink and crouch and creep
Round and about the firelight when all the world's asleep.

The ragged, jagged screen of trees, the belt of bush between,
The spacious upland where the breeze peeps out across the scene.
The shrouded streams that wind away in shadow at high noon,
The tiny, tasselled clouds that play about a silver moon.

The paths that thread their twisted line beneath a brazen sky,
And raw-limbed cactuses that twine above as we go by,
And silent ghosts that shuffle past aloof, as ghosts should be,
From shadows where their lot was cast into Eternity.

This is the world we left behind, *en route* for
London Town,
This is the world we hoped to find when Pleasures
weighed us down—
This is the world that Nature made—her own
peculiar star—
Wherein She plies her eerie trade, unhindered and
afar.

We love each whisper of the wind, each rumour of
the road—
Each frowsy goatskin slung behind, and every
knotted load,
Each red-brown village framed in smoke among
the feathered maize,
Even the belts of scrub that cloak the glories of
the ways.

God gave the Heathen woes enough—but deep
content as well,
Fashioning him from sterner stuff to bear a sterner
hell—
The soft-skinned darlings of the West may cling
to Fortune's lap—
Our lot, perhaps, is still the best, marching across
the map.

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT

Just a cry in the night—then a roar, and a shout,
And the grass springs alight, and the fires blaze out—
Is he here? Is he there? Let us peer! let us stare!
But he's off to his lair though his scent's still about.

* * * *

Just a rending of flesh and a crunching of bone,
And a growling afresh, and a pitiful groan—
Do you hear it? Ah! ssh! How they scramble and push!—
See! There's blood on that bush! Did you hear the man moan?

* * * *

Not a star in the sky, and the moon wasn't out
When His Lordship went by. And there isn't a doubt

That the poor devil's dead . . . he was cooking, they said,
When He clawed at his head with a deuce of a clout.

Have you matches? Ah, good! And a candle to spare?
I should put on the hood—it'll lessen the glare.
I've the small ·303. What have you? SSG?
Well, here's luck till we see if He's left us the hair!

ON THE ROAD

Loquitur Balamwezi, a hundred miles from anywhere. He is balancing a jagged, unpleasant-looking case upon his head, and has stubbed the first joint off two toes on his left foot.

Eya! That's the worst of a wife
As thin as a bundle of reeds,
That worries a wretched man out of his life,
Won't cook beans, and stirs up strife
Till I hump a load from Ndola to Fife
To buy her a string of beads!

Yaba! The box is as heavy as lead—
Jagged! Won't lie flat!
And here's what the fool of a White Man said—
"Carry it straight or I'll punch your head;
It's whisky—*kachasa*—daily bread . . . !"
What did he mean by that?

Yangu! I've been on the road a week,
And I've three more weeks to go;
The wind in the morning's devilish bleak,

At mid-day the sweat runs down one's cheek,
And at night the hyænas come round to sneak
A meal off my wretched toe.

* * * *

The White Man may sit on his hams and swear,
And call for his drink in vain,
And Bwadya can rave and tear her hair
And growl that she's starving, with nothing to wear ;
She can marry Mulenga for all I care,
I'm *blowed* if I'm going again !
(But he does, all the same.)

HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

BURY me deep, and dig me in—it's all you have to do,
And set a stone that'll save my skin from the slinking jackal crew :
Plant me out where the paths divide, up on the edge of the thorn,
And tuck the rifle down at my side (the barrels are badly worn).

I reckon it may be good to know, when the worms have had their fill,
That the dear old 'phunts still come and go over the hump of the hill—
Dead as a nail, I'll bet I hear their thumping feet go by,
And the flogging tail, and the flapping ear between my bones and the sky.

Lonely, you think? a rum idea? That's for a man
to say!
I've known this country many a year, and I came
out here to stay;
I'd rather be planted fair and free, with a beast or
two around
Than in a suburban cemetery, next to the Under-
ground.

'Twon't be so lonely, for a lot of niggers are bound
to pass
Chasing a buck, as like as not, skidding along in
the grass—
You know the place that I've got in view? just
where the paths divide,
And one goes east to the Little Lovu, and one to
the Congo Side.

* * * *

'Tisn't as if I'd much to lose! You'd better grab
my kit,
There isn't enough to pick and choose, and I've
sold the best of it.
One or two decent heads, perhaps—the roan goes
thirty, full,
A pair of fairly useful straps, and the tusks of
that last old bull.

You reckon you'll feel it? Not a damn! A week
at the wide outside,
You may be wondering where I am, and then you'll
let it slide!
The dog'll be hit the worst, I bet—for dogs are
built that way,
And a dog can't swear, though he don't forget,
and he can't flop down and pray.

* * * *

Anything else before I go? . . . I reckon I'm
nearly due . . .
. . . No! Not painful . . . but devilish slow . . .
Sort of feel bent askew . . .
Dig it deep . . . and moderate wide . . . shove my
head to the dawn . . .
. . . Don't forget . . . Where the paths divide,
just on the edge of the thorn. . . .

THE ADMINISTRATORS

WHEN all is said and done, in the lands of Eternal Sun
There are tasks, but half begun, men give their lives to learn;
Pitiably underpaid, with promotion long delayed,
They work for the love of their trade and not for a cash return.

Others may strive and strain for a more substantial gain—
THESE make the rough ways plain, open the desert door;
What if they slave unknown—unnoted and alone?
Their world is at least their own, out of the City's roar.

Which is the better fee? A brief celebrity,
And fools to crook the knee and smirk at their lightest smile?

Or, heathen customs banned, peace through a savage land,
And the shake of a White Man's hand once in a dreary while?

Many may dub them fools—indeed, by the golden rules
Of the modern Mammon Schools, they come of a foolish breed;
For their lives go up in smoke, and their necks are tied to the yoke,
They're weary, and well-nigh "broke"—and yet they cling to their creed.

Nay, they are wise enough, and made of a sterner stuff
Than puppies shooting the cuff at the change of a Gaiety scene;
Peace, at the last, is theirs, and the scent of bush-land airs,
And Death that comes unawares, merciful, swift and—clean.

If, in the camp-fire glow, when the moon is hanging low,
Sick of "the blasted show" they yearn for the lights of Town,

Yet the dawn will come again, and the buck on
open plain,
And the cool that follows the rain—so the country
pins them down.

There isn't a man of them all who'd follow the
luring call
Of vice and the music-hall for more than a month
at best;
'Twould be "Hey for a heathen crew, and a rickety
old canoe,
"And a gun and a dog or two—and the Devil may
take the rest!"

"Give us our daily work! It's death for a man
to shirk—
Back we go with a jerk to the Villages of the
Plain;
Heathens to oversee—census and tithe and fee;
Worked to the bone—but *free!* It's good to be
back again!"

THE MAGIC PLAINS

WHEN the world is out of gear,
When our Gods have gone astray,
When the ghosts of yester-year
Rise to taunt the coming day,
In the lull before the rains
Hie we to the Magic Plains.

Tapestries of tender green,
Screens of grass like cloth of gold,
Belts of bushland in between
Where the pinky buds unfold,
Wisps of smoke from heathen fires
On the Plain of our Desires.

Red-rimmed sun and lacy cloud,
Hazy mists that hover low,
Russet trees with branches bowed,
Silent, sluggish streams that flow,
Almost halt, yet never tire,
Through the Plain of my Desire.

Shadow shapes with sweeping horns
Glinting in the level rays,
Shapes that through a thousand dawns
Feed along the meadow ways,
Roan and eland and the rest
Grazing toward the golden West.

Or, when twilight shadows fall,
And the catlike creatures prowl,
Blending with hyæna call
Come the cries of waterfowl—
Thus the shadows creep again
Out across the Magic Plain.

THE "CHISANGUKA."

NOTE.—The Awemba believe that their Chiefs are often reincarnated in the shape of lions, and are chary of attempting to kill animals with such a reputation, even though they be notorious man-eaters.

WHO was it killed Mulenga a couple of weeks ago?
Bwana, they *said* a lion—but how should the Black Man know?
Was it a hunting lion? That must be as it may!
Lion, leopard, or jackal—it's not for your slave to say.

* * * *

Why should I tell you, Bwana? You'll laugh and say it's a lie;
White Men think that our Chiefs are but food for worms when they die;
They take no care to appease them, they take no heed of their wrath
When the dead Chiefs fall on a village and harry the people forth.

You know more than the others—you've written our stories down,
You know the Grove of the Spirits, out by Mwaruli Town;
Legends of Chitimukulu in their tens and tens again
You've heard me tell by the fire at elephant camps in the rain.

And yet, when the Chisanguka was walking a week ago
You bade me set up a Snider-trap, and reckoned to kill it so!
Eh! but you're mad, you White Men—foolish beyond belief,
There was never a bullet moulded yet that would kill a reborn Chief.

You write our names in the village; our lives are laid in your hand;
You're skilled in curious medicines, and yours are the laws of the land,
You've wonderful "talking-boxes," weapons and books and tools,
And yet, in the things that matter, your words are the words of fools.

Bwana, it *wasn't* a lion! Shall we not know our own?
Does a dead Chief speak in other than the living Chieftain's tone?
He came in the guise of a lion—we found his spoor I know,
But the soul of the beast was Mwamba, who died ten moons ago.

He killed two men by the river; he took a girl at the ford;
Why? that the tribe should tremble when Mwamba walks abroad!
Why did he leave the bodies? You can bear witness there
That we followed his tracks till sundown and never came near his lair.

* * * * *

You're hard on our people, Bwana; you taunt us with being afraid,
And all in a breath you fine us because we will not stockade;
You say it's a "lion-country," and laugh our beliefs to scorn,
But—the lion that killed Mulenga was Mwamba—newly born.

THE BUCCANEERS

(A sidelight upon an immoral, modern profession.)

LET others go pry in the spinneys
In quest of the rabbit or hare,
Our booty's the gay, golden guinea,
The meed of the millionaire;
Too trivial a prey is the rabbit,
The commonplace pheasant we shunt,
For we have contracted the perilous habit
Of poaching the "phunt."

The Native Commissioner knows us
(And knows that we think him a "mug"),
The Magistrate solemnly shows us
The laws that will land us in "jug";
The Germans would hang us for treason,
The Belgians would boil us alive
(And between us we've shot to the end of the season
A hundred and five).

Our profits are piling up daily
(We're thinking of buying a farm),
We smuggle our ivory gaily
From Congo to Dar-es-Salaam;
The harassed official upbraids us,
And vows that he'll clink us on sight,
When a wily Swahili complacently trades us
A dhow in the night.

When others are snoring sedately,
We're hot on the track of the herd;
We've been very fortunate lately,
For no one has uttered a word;
The last was an eighty-five pounder,
Going seven foot two on the curve
(And I'm pleased to remark that we shot the old bounder
In the Mweru Reserve!)

Thus time very pleasantly passes,
And money is easy to make;
I suppose we're the "criminal classes,"
But *that* doesn't keep us awake!
When on Game Laws one's gaily encroaching,
All else is but rind and the husk,
And there's nothing to equal the glamour of poaching
A whopping great tusk!

THE MWAVI TREE

I saw it first in a blazing noon, when the leaves
were splotched with gold,
And smiled to think of the foolishness of a
mumbled heathen prayer;
. . . I saw it again when a silver moon revealed
it, stiff and cold,
But I shuddered then at the deeds of blood that
had been accomplished there.

* * * *

Out to the Bush ye go!—the Chief has spoken,
Decreed a test, whereby ye shall abide;
Let none demur!—the Mwavi shall betoken
Whether he live or die; let it decide.
Misumbi died in child-birth yesterday—
He was Misumbi's lover, so they say—
And now the Gods have snatched her from his
side.

Bring offerings to the Spirits—beads and flour
And porridge in your little bowls of clay;
Beat out the Magic Bark to lend it power,
And get your poison brewed and borne away.
Set ye a naked child in Mongu's arms
To garner up and carry off the charms
(Mongu the Witchman's gaily decked to-day).

Go summon ye each woman from her garden,
And bid her whet her hoe upon the stone,
For Mwavi knows no mercy and no pardon—
Vengeance, and vengeance only, can atone.
Misumbi's dead, and we have laid her by
With stiffened limbs, and features wrenched awry;
And now, the Mwavi clamours for its own.

Listen! The drums are beating in the village!
Soon shall the Chief come forth and doom decree,
Lest the dread curse alight on crop and tillage
And blast his people with grim destiny.
Let death be dealt, lest worser things befall,
Lest some dread sickness come upon us all;
Come, bring the Bowl, and bind him to the Tree!

CHUNGU ON PROGRESS

You ask me, White Man, how we stand—
How fare my people in the land
Now that old laws are dying fast
And White Man's peace is ours at last?
Listen! . . . You see this shrivelled hand? . .
Well, even so, my power has passed!

White Man, why do you come to *me*? . . .
To see how humbled Chiefs may be? . . .
I *was* a Chief, or, so they say,
And men were mine to bind and slay;
They lived or died at my decree—
Where is old Chungu's power to-day?

Peace of the White Man! Aye, forsooth!
We have it!—and, in simple truth,
Would gladly have our wars again.
No more shall Chungu sweep the plain,
And foes divide before his ruth
Like grass before the driving rain.

My warriors, who once were mine,
To slay and mutilate and fine,
Are swathed in blankets—mine recruits
That prate of shirts and hats and boots—
My women, who obeyed my sign,
Now feed their Chief on grubs and roots.

What if they pluck me by the beard?
Me, Chungu, whom they once revered?
Have I the right to burn and maim
And slay?—Not I! Must "lodge a claim"
With some young stripling, lately reared,
To whom "Old Chungu's" but a name.

* * * *

Nay, you are wise and just, I know . . .
No doubt the old days had to go—
The Black Man cannot hope to stand
Before the stranger in his land,
And yet . . . you strike a bitter blow
At Chiefs who held men in their hand!

Gone are the days of tithe and fee,
Gone are the days when my decree
Would hold along the wide Lovu
And Tanganyika's beaches too.
A Chief, forsooth! I'm eaten through
Like some old battered forest tree,
And thank the Gods my days are few!

ON THE MOVE

(A Ditty of the Dry Season)

BANG the safe and lock it,
Don't forget the key!
With it in your pocket
Once again you're free—
Tucked away behind you
Are the months of rain,
And to-night will find you
Out in camp again.

Give your last instructions
To the Native Clerk—
Warn him against ructions,
Beer drinks after dark;
Curse the gaol-guards roundly
Just to see them through—
They'll be sleeping soundly
For a month or two!

Map the "prison labour"
Most exactly out—
(Each will trust his neighbour
For the job, no doubt)
Spend a frantic hour
On the Station's needs,
Soap, and salt, and flour,
Calico and beads.

See the carriers bustle,
Streaking down the path,
Watch the headmen hustle
Box and bale and bath—
Blest is expectation!
Even now they eat
In anticipation
Gory chunks of meat.

Bored to death with "cases,"
Grousing at the grind,
Fed up with the faces
Of those you leave behind,
Mad with them that paid you,
Riddled with routine,
Thank the God Who made you
For a change of scene!

Hey for weeks of camping
Full of magic zest,
Days of honest tramping,
Nights of honest rest!
Bang the door behind you,
Trek with might and main,
For to-night will find you
In the bush again!

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T GO HOME

He lived in a rickety shanty
Out on the edge o' beyond;
His rations were somewhat scanty
Of drink he was far too fond;
Dead was his young ambition,
He'd lost his brush and comb—
Said he, "I'm content with the present condition,
I'm da—d if I ever go Home."

Week upon week of hunting,
That was his one delight—
Rhino, buffalo, "phunting,"
The roar of the lion at night.
Clothes were a minor question,
He'd button them up with a thorn,
And his hat and his boots were a mere suggestion
Of what is usually worn.

Life, as he blandly viewed it,
Stood for a poker hand
With a cash result, and he "blued" it
Over the local brand—
His wife was a heathen beauty
Bought with an ancient gun,
Who reckoned, no doubt, she'd done her duty
Once she'd borne him a son.

Someone—a parson, maybe,
Told him to pack and "git"—
Get him an English wife and baby
And all the rest of it;
Tried to induce a craving
For the isle across the foam,
"I couldn't put up with the daily shaving"
Said the Man Who Wouldn't Go Home.

He wasn't a nice example,
His morals, I grant, were few,
But there's many a rottener sample
Renting a stiff-backed pew—
Battered, bleary, and broken,
He shot as a sportsman should,
And many a native, more's the token,
Knew that his word was good.

What is the proper moral?
    How should such creatures end?
Shot in a drunken quarrel?
    Lynched for cheating his friend?
No! In the tangled jungle
    Where the Elephant People roam
He stood his ground as the great beasts thundered,
Gave his life for a boy who'd blundered—
    That's how the man went Home.

THE BACHELOR'S DOG

"SHE's coming!"—so he said to-day, over the mid-day bone,
"Cheer up, you blighter!"—so he said, "we shan't be long alone!
She'll give us decent food at last—buck up, and wag your tail!
The Only Woman's on the way—She's coming by the mail!"

The deuce She is! and who is *She*, when all is said and done?
Some fuzzy, fluffy Thing in skirts that's never seen a gun!
My sacred tail! I used to think he knew his way about,
But here's a horrid incubus he's been and ordered out!

What'll She do when lions prowl around about the camp?
What'll She do at early dawn, when all the paths are damp?
Wow! what a muddle! What a mug my poor old boss must be
To go and do a thing like this without consulting me!

I wonder if She's any good at following a trail?
(Probably couldn't tell the scent of buffalo from quail!)
I bet She shrieks like blazes when She sees her first fat rat,
What's more, I bet she makes me wipe my paws upon the mat!

Oh, Bwana! Bwana!—You and I have had a gorgeous time!
Why do you go and spoil it now when we are in our prime?
What are the elephants going to do? and what becomes of ME
The while you sit and drivel with this Thing from oversea?

Have you forgotten all the days we've spent upon the plains?
The steaming, soppy camps we've had together in the Rains,
The days I've been without a bite from sun-up to the dark
Following up the Herd ahead with never a yelp nor bark?

You can't be lonely, surely, when I'm lying by the bed?
I mayn't be much to look at, but I'm fairly cleanly bred—
I can't play Bridge, or Poker—but you've pals about that can,
And anyway, the Thing that's coming out is not a Man!

* * * *

Give me a bone and let me think! my world has gone to bits—
Our peaceful days have given place to fifty thousand fits!
She'll bust the contract, just you see! and, when my tail's a-droop,
You'll know She's taken all my bones and made them into soup!

TO THE GIRL WHO WOULDN'T COME

GIVE me the sun on the river, the misty dawn on the plain,
The mealie-leaves a-quiver, spangled with gems of rain,
The tiny, grey-roofed dwellings with twisting smoke above
And take and hold the gain and the gold, or whatever your soul may love!

Fate, in forgotten ages, set me here in the wild,
Wrote in her mildewed pages, "This shall be Nature's child,"
Drew me out from the clamour, set my feet to the south
And left you there in the City's snare with a mocking word in your mouth.

You were Her pet invention, bound to the whirring wheel
Of costive, cramped convention with bonds of the sternest steel,
Delicate, deftly-tempered, clad in a gauzy gown—
That was your lot—to be left to rot in the grimy maze of Town.

Hunger and Thirst a-creeping—Death, and his twin, Disease,
These would have brought you, weeping, on to your dainty knees—
Cold as a clear-cut crystal, jewelled like an evening star,
With your infinite grace you dared not face the stress of Things that Are!

Once, I believed you mattered—hailed you a Goddess then,
Till you left me, gold-bespattered, for the safer haunts of men;
But now . . . a gun on the mountain-side, and a glimpse of the game ahead—
You may languish there, and grapple despair, and pray your God you were dead!

ON THE VERANDAH

OUT on the dim verandah, God stooped to me
and said,
"You've wasted a day of the life I gave—and a
wasted day is dead!
What have you done in My world to-day?"—I
smiled as I replied:
"I've saved a child from the bite of a snake!"
And God was satisfied.

Out on the dim verandah, when bats were wheeling
low,
Again God came, and I felt His Wings, and I
saw The Presence glow—
"You've wasted a day!" said God to me—but
swiftly I replied:
"I have saved the crops of a thousand men!"
And God was satisfied.

Out on the dim verandah, when stars were twinkling clear,
The Godhead came, and I saw the Light that gleamed as He drew near;
"What have you done this day?" He asked. I thought, and then replied:
"I have tried the cause of an injured man!" And God was satisfied.

Out on the dim verandah, when twilight hours were past,
God came once more, and His Breath was cold, and I felt the icy blast—
"You have lost to-day!" said God to me, and I shuddered as I replied:
"I have written a page of a book to-day!" And God was wroth, and cried:

"Those that I set to govern men have work enough in sight—
Crops to garner, and lives to save, and wrongs to set aright!
Books forsooth!"—and He smote His Thigh, and the world grew dark for me,
And I woke to find I was chained in Hell, to write for Eternity.

THE OLD STORY

A YEAR ago we said goodbye—
In a crimson mist the sun went down—
A year ago and our hearts were high
(Heigho! London Town!)

A year ago and the world was mine,
The sun was bright on the crested trees,
And Love reached over the fields of brine
(Heigho! and the rolling seas!)

One short year—and I thought to glean
Glory, and God knows what beside,
But the curse of Africa came between
(Heigho! for the fields untried!)

Chipped tin plates, and a leaking hut,
Faces black as the Yawning Pit,
And the Door of Hope is tightly shut—
(Heigho! and the gloom of it!)

I'm poorer now than I was before,
Treading the grim, predestined road,
Bills are mounting at every store—
(Heighŏ! and the debtor's load!)

* * * *

One short year? 'Twill be nearer ten
Ere the cable flashes across the sea,
And you pack your trunks for the voyage—
and then—
What of the years Fate owes to me?

BEFORE DAWN

STILL was the camp—so deathly still
That dry twigs snapped like the Whip of Doom,
And a pale, green moon climbed up the hill,
And the shadows lay, so cold, so chill,
Shimmering shreds of gloom.

Never a sound where the men were laid
Stretched and swathed on the earthy floor,
Save for a sigh when, half afraid,
A sleeper moved, at his dream dismayed,
And sank to his sleep once more.

The moon climbed up, and she poised on high,
And looked awhile in a cold disdain,
Flashed her searchlights 'thwart the sky,
Lit the river that rumbled by
And took her path again.

* * * *

Still was the camp—so cold, so still
In the dim dead hours before the dawn,
When a cry rang out to the far-off hill,
And marrow and bones went cold and chill,
And slumber was forsworn.

For a lion slunk in the deeper shade,
And his footfall thudded low—so low—
Over the grass of a tiny glade;
Hardly a sound—but the die was played,
And he took a man from the row.

THE COUNCILLOR

Old, indeed, as his people go—three score years and ten,
He sat in the dusky council-place and swayed the minds of men;
Chief? Why, no! Nor a Village Head—nor blood nor rank he knew,
But the people hushed to the words he said, the still, hot hours through.

Bleary, battered and broken down—but his law was clean and sound,
Law that had swayed his people's fate full many a cycle round—
Law of the Crop and law of the Chase, and law of the Man and Wife,
The concrete rules of a savage race that govern the Simple Life.

Slow and low were the words he spoke, and each
fell trim and plumb,
And the Chief himself leaned forward once as he
ravelled out the sum;
Marked each point with a skinny hand, weighed
and balanced again,
Quoted the changeless Law of the Land as he
made the issue plain.

Passionless as an ice-machine—dreary and dry as
dust—
A pitiful, wistful Might-have-been, but sure of the
People's trust;
Sure of his logic, sure of the Law, summoned to
solve the knot
Of a twopenny-halfpenny case that bore on the
right to a broken pot!

* * * *

Just the same, in the olden days, they sat in their
silent rows,
When men were brought to the judgment-seat to
be tried for the eyes or nose;
Just the same when they burned a man with the
partner in his sin,
Sure of the changeless Law of the Land—bent
upon "rubbing it in."

* * * *

I sat at ease in a patch of shade and thought of
the busy Strand,
Of ponderous buildings where men strive to grasp
the Law of the Land,
Of a million lies that obscure the truth, of trickery,
sham, chicane—
There's many a "tip" to be learned, in sooth, from
the Villages of the Plain!

TWO SONGS FROM THE MASHONA

I

AFRICAN SLUMBER SONG

SLEEP, Baby mine! The jackals by the river
Are calling soft across the dim lagoon,
Where tufted rows of mealies stand a-quiver
Under a silver moon.

Little One, sleep! The cattle, softly lowing,
Seek once again the shelter of the kraal—
To-morrow come the reaping and the sowing—
To-night the shadows fall.

Little One, sleep! Grow stalwart in your sleeping!
The kraal is ringed with fires, redly bright—
Out in the forest tracks the beasts are creeping—
Sleep, Baby mine, to-night!

TWO SONGS FROM THE MASHONA

II

AFRICAN LOVE SONG

MARUPIYA, Marupiya! all the world is hushed and dumb,
And the girls have ceased their singing, and the cattle are at rest,
And the men are droning softly to the rumble of the drum,
And the fireflies are dancing in the west—
But the woods will sing their songs for us alone,
And the Gods will teach us secrets of their own—
Come! Marupiya, come!

Treading softly past the Headmen, by the fires we will go—
Marupiya, Marupiya, we are happier than they!

For the youth in them has shrivelled, and their
blood has turned to snow,
And they dream of a forgotten yesterday!
Are there Spirits in the forest? Let them be,
They are good to honest lovers, such as we—
Stay, Marupiya, stay!

RETROSPECT

WHAT of the years of strife, Lucette,
Far out beyond the pale?
What of the thoughts that haunt me yet
Upon the backward trail?—
I've sinned red sins that mount apace,
But must I then forget
The tender grace that lit your face
Amid the mignonette?

What of the traps that lurk, Lucette,
Beyond the world you're in?
(Dim bushland solitudes are set
With trapfall and with gin!)
No woman's hand is here to lead,
No kiss to kill regret—
We follow here a sterner creed
Than 'mid the mignonette.

Oft in the silent camp, Lucette,
At darkling hour of dawn
I dream of hours when we met
Amid the English thorn—
Out of those peaceful English days
I blundered forth—and yet—
Your picture treads the tangled ways
Next to my heart, Lucette!

IN THE SMOKE

DELICATE wisps of grey and filmy blue
Athwart the sky—
Red leaping sparks, that pierce the darkness through
And fall, and die.

Sprinkle of stars, swung high above the trees,
And, clear of ray,
A low, sad moon—the cadence of the breeze
And boughs a-sway.

These for the setting; and, beneath it all,
Tattered and scarred,
My tent, set up in some wide glade, where tall
Dim trees keep guard.

* * * *

The high-piled logs are reddening to the heart,
The ash lies deep
Feathery-white—and, in a space apart,
Lie men asleep.

So, in a silence of the early world,
I sit and gaze
Upon the pictures, open and unfurled
Amid the haze.

Faces of men and women of the past,
Well-loved—and dead;
Cities through whose dim ways my feet have passed
With pilgrim tread—

Lights, and soft music, and a crimson rain
Of rare, sweet flowers—
Pleasure most prodigal, shot through with pain
Of vanished hours—

Sounds of the sea—and glimpses of white waves
And biting spray—
Cypress, and myrtle—well-remembered graves
Of yesterday. . . .

* * * *

These in the smoke—that veil which fools the eyes
And links the past
Up with the future—till the fire dies
Black out at last.

GRAVES OF THE NORTH

ONLY a few—wide-scattered through the land,
Sun-kissed, wind-swept, and scorched by forest fire,
Grey mounds of earth to mark the dead White Hand,
Grim tributes to an Empire's wide desire,
Stretching afield through barren waste and wild
Till Heathendom and She are reconciled.

Only a few—yet mighty in degree,
Though humbly screened from forest beasts of prey—
Crosses rough-hewn from some primæval tree,
Lines of sad brick to bar the right of way
Bounding the track where heathen feet may tread
(Since White Men all are jealous of their dead).

Maybe, a trader, peacefully asleep
(His bond, at least, was good—his word was true);
Some missionary, with wild fields to reap,
Groping in dim, black brains to find a clue;
Some hunter, say, all torn and wrenched awry
By gleaming claws, or curved, sharp ivory.

Or, once again, amid the press of men,
Where bugles blare Reveille and Retreat,
Some young official snatched to silence when
His sphere of usefulness was incomplete—
Sadness, and tears, and bitterness of soul
To blunt the triumph of the scarce-found goal.

Their lives were given in a gallant cause—
And we, most humbly, mark their resting-place,
Whether they made, or gave, or kept the laws
That bring contentment to an alien race—
So, while the Empire cycle goes its round,
Our Northern graves are, surely, holy ground.

A RIDDLE OF ROADS

Is it better to move in the morning
On paths that are dappled with dew,
Where cavernous chasms are yawning
Through lands that are painfully new?
Or is it still better to wander
In streets that have pavements as well,
And shops, with enticements to squander? . . .
I wish I could tell!

The ripple and rush of the river?
The thud and the talk of the Town?
Sad spaces where leaves are a-quiver?
Gaiety, glamour and gown?
These are the things that perplex one—
Which should one choose of the two?
Should silence or shouting annex one? . . .
If only one knew! . .

Here is a town in a clearing
(Town, say, for courtesy's sake),
Tender green mealies are peering
Out of each thicket and brake—
There are the charms of the city,
Men you can shake by the hand,
Women who smile and look pretty . . .
Which is the land? . . .

Here, you must walk or be carried—
There you may roll in your car—
Here it is best to be married,
There, you can stay as you are—
Who has the best of it really,
The tramp, or the man in the train?
It's hard to adjudicate clearly . . .
Ask me again!

THEN AND NOW

We came with muscles tense and taut,
With youthful hearts aflame,
Pulsing with fresh, untrammelled thought,
Keen on the new-found game—
But now, the red has burned to grey
And glamour rocks on feet of clay.

We tramp not, as we tramped of old
Across the rolling vast;
The patterns of green grass and gold
Have wearied us at last;
And, though we love the country still,
We do not toil up every hill.

* * * *

Yet, in exchange, our souls have won
A certain meed of peace,
We need not fret till set of sun
To win desired release. . . .
The bushland borders of our ken
Must hold us ever—now as then.

THE PIONEERS

PARTLY for sake of the gold
At the Rainbow's End,
Glamour of old tales told
At the gloom of day.
Partly, too, for the peace
Wide spaces lend,
Sought we the soft release
Of the Far Away.

Bush and valley and hill,
And a pastel sky,
Woodland spaces still
In the hush of noon,
Angry cities of men
Set safely by—
What could one ask for then
As a greater boon ?

Wide, slow rivers set
In their banks of green,
Forests, immune as yet
From an alien tread—
Stretches of golden plain
In a hazy sheen—
Shall we turn to the town again
For our life instead?

Let them laugh if they will
In their towns of gold,
Men of the mart and mill
Where the stamps grind on—
Our lives are empty of care,
And gaily scrolled,
And the wild will still be there
When the stamps are gone.

AN OPEN LETTER

(To John Brown, Esq., Little Slushem, England)

DEAR Sir, I take my pen in hand
With some slight trepidation,
To write you from a heathen land
Anent your education.

You speak in phrases ripe and round,
Well polished, and in order,
Of "Men who keep the Frontier Ground,"
And "Men who make the Border."

On Sunday evenings, in your pew,
You thrill with proud vibration
To think that you are bone and thew
Of God's first-favoured nation.

Your measured periods, slightly vague,
Leave us no room to doubt it,
And yet . . . you shun, as 'twere the plague,
All literature about it!

How White Men live in heathen lands,
And what they run the show on,
Has no such interest in your hands
As "Hints on Golf"—and so on.

While Mrs. Brown, whose tender heart
Bleeds at the "heathen's hovel,"
Leaves "all that heavy stuff" apart,
And picks—the latest novel!

Your critics, too, with faintest praise,
Will damn the wretched writer
Who, slaving through the tropic days,
Ne'er finds his burden lighter.

". . . This latest book on Bungaboo
Has partially succeeded . . .
The writer scores a point or two . . .
Amusing—but unneeded! . . ."

As for their luckless poets—nay,
It sets the tears a-rippling—
Them you would gladly boil and flay
Because—you've heard of Kipling!

* * * *

Dear Mr. Brown, I know you well,
Although I've never met you—
I spent some years in Smugdom's hell,
And never shall forget you.

If "Empire" really thrills your soul,
And not mere bald convention,
For goodness' sake, then, pay the toll
And study with intention!

Get farther from the parish pump!
Take out your brains and brush 'em!
The Empire's politics do *not* jump
With those of Little Slushem!

BUSH MADRIGAL

My letters came this morning,
Packed full of weary warning;
They write that life is flying,
That those I know are dying—
But freedom's sweet!
I hate the Street,
Its selling and its buying!

Let others bear the burden,
So be they prize the guerdon—
Be mine the bushland spaces
And Nature's tender traces—
For me, indeed,
I see no need
To woo the Town's embraces!

Too well I know its glamour,
Its brazen-throated clamour,

Its pitiful contriving,
Its lying and its striving—
Too well I know
Its sinners go
With never hope of shriving.

The waste of bricks and mortar
Ruled by King Sorrow's Daughter—
Full horrid trades are plied there,
And luckless wights are tied there—
God help the man
(None other can !)
Who's fated to abide there !

TO AN OLD RIFLE

You're worn in the barrel, you're gone in the stock,
Your sights are deceptive and battered askew,
You're foul in the breech and you're crank in the lock,
Yet I love you far more than I loved you when new!
I've done a fair quotum of stalking and shooting,
Old Rifle, with you.

You didn't cost much!—you were bought second-hand
(For times were too hard, and my purse was too thin!)
I saw you one day in a shop in the Strand,
Loved you, and longed for you—aye, and went in!
The shop-fellow fingered you lovingly—said that your price was a sin.

Whose were you before? shall I hazard a view?
Were you loot of a lord, or a wandering earl?
Just kit of a "champagne-safari" or two?
Or sold by a man who had married his girl,
Forsaking the elephant-track lest it put her dear
hair out of curl?

The point's unimportant—we'll waive it and pass.
You're mine for the present, and mine you'll remain!
Ten years we have wandered through African grass,
Ten years we've been shooting in bushland and plain,
It's told on us both, more or less—but I'm blest
if I'll sell you again!

Remember the lion I grazed in the head
Who charged us that night in the bed of the stream?
He shewed us, in sooth (since we thought he was dead),
That things are but rarely the same as they seem,
And *he* was a gem, I remember; uncommonly broad
in the beam.

That elephant cow, with the fat little calf
Who curtsied and bobbed when we tried to get by,
Till I shot her at last. And the idiot giraffe
Who gibbered away with his head in the sky
That morning we followed the rhino, and seemed so determined to die.

Yes! Eland and hartebeeste, sable and roan,
Puku and reedbuck you've shot by the score
Elephant-paths we have followed alone,
Safety-catch over and eyes on the spoor.
Days, that are finished and done with, Old Rifle! It's never no more!

Ah well! Those are days that are vanished and dead!
And gone are the dawn and the dusk on the plain,
It's Tooting, or Balham, or Clapham instead—
These are our lot for the years that remain . . .
But while there's a pull-through to clean you, I'm *damned* if I'll sell you again.

GOBLIN GOLD

"You'll always find the best gold over the rise."
Prospector's maxim.

WHERE levels run to the slopes, and the slopes
run up to the ridge,
And the heat-haze hangs in the air, and the
shadows shorten amain,
Where the pathway crosses the river, over a crazy
bridge,
And wriggles, through tangled bushland, into the
open again—
Where man's but a flustered rabbit against the
beasts of the plain,
And heathen magic's afoot when sunset shadows
the skies,
We'll hitch up our "shorts" and tighten our belts
to the old refrain—
"Africa's tough, my God! . . . but there's gold
just over the rise!"

Walk for a score of miles, red-hot, in a blazing land,
Spurt for the pool pricked out on the map in the cool of dawn
To find but a thirsty frog—and *then* you may understand
Africa's jests, and the men from whom her lovers are drawn ! . . .
Lovers, said I ? in sooth, her vows are most forsworn,
Her kiss bites deep like an asp, and there's death in her sleepy eyes,
But think of an English stream and a field of waving corn,
And God will help you believe that there's gold just over the rise !

* * * *

There's several kinds of gold—red gold, that is minted clean,
That buys you Heaven and Hell with a careless dash of the pen,
And shadowy Gold o' Dreams that speaks of the Might Have Been,
Of the dizzy gulfs that yawn betwixt the Now and the Then.

There's Gold of Honour and Fame and the meed
of public ken,
And gold of an aim achieved, of a sober life and
wise,
But never a kind of gold that passes the test of
men
To rank with the Goblin Gold you're out for—
over the rise!

A BALLAD IN SEASON

Out of the brazen heat
Where furnace breezes blow,
And where, beneath the feet,
The soft red sand's aglow,
Homeward our greetings go
From barren lands and lean
—'Tis Christmastide, I trow,
Though waves roll wide between.

Patter of heathen feet,
Dark forms that mop and mow,
Dim passion and deceit
So be it!—Even so
The stream of years that flow
Is spanned to-night, I ween,
Nor love nor friendship know
The waves that roll between.

Here, in the dusty street,
Hot rains are driving low,
And bush and sunset meet
In misty afterglow.
There, where you wait, a-row
Tall houses make a screen,
Curtained in ice and snow,
And waves roll wide between.

* * * *

L'ENVOI

'Twas God Who planned it so—
And Christmas aye has been
A link 'twixt sun and snow,
Though waves roll wide between.

AFRICAN AUTHORS

Pity the men who are fated to scribe
Under the glare of the tropical sun,
Striving for cash, or some fugitive bribe,
Weary ere day has begun.

Pity the brains that must work to a drum
Beaten to quicken the beer-sodden feet
Down in the village with heathenish hum
(Ink has gone dry with the heat).

* * * *

Better to cope with the bustle and roar,
Fever of Fleet Street, or song of the Strand—
Easier, there, to keep wolf from the door
Than in this heathenish land . . . !

There, there are brains to strike sparks with one's own—
Here are but monkey-folk, shallow and sly !
Wits that one has one must sharpen alone
Under a coppery sky.

Shadow and sunshine, and plateau and plain,
Vacant horizons and silence supreme,
Mile upon mile of a heathen domain
Framing the scribbler's dream.

Never a newspaper hot from the press,
Fresh from the hub where the nations are twirled,
Never a message to help one to guess
What is going on in the world.

* * * *

Picture your writers, perspiring, "broke,"
Shirtsleeved, and sullen, and slack as the deuce!
Truly, ambition goes upward like smoke,
Scatters . . . and—what is the use?

THE LAMENT OF ABDULLAH-BIN-SULIMAN

THERE'S peace on the northern border—has been,
this many a year;
Gone are the loot, and the strings of slaves—gone
for ever, I fear!
Government harries us far and wide—there's never
a tusk in the country-side . . .
And what, in the name of the Prophet, does
Abdullah-bin-Suliman here?

Close upon forty years ago I traded from
Zanzibar
With a caravan of a thousand slaves gathered from
near and far,
Down from Ujiji, across the Lake . . . ah, those
days! . . . there was money to make!
Plenty of women and rubber and guns—and mine
was a lucky star!

Young we were—and agile—and keen! red blood in our veins aglow,
And Fate and the women were kind enough as we journeyed to and fro—
Tabora—Kasanga—Cameron Bay—Love, and loot, and a passing fray
To while the tedium now and again—but it's long enough ago!

* * * *

I, forsooth, was the pioneer, trusted to spy the land—
Wemba, Lungu, and Tawa Chiefs lay in the palm of my hand—
East and west there was work to do . . . northward into the Congo too,
Till the British flag came up from the south and scattered our little band.

Hasani there! he was just a youth, nimble and brisk and gay—
Look at his palsied, shrivelled hands, and his beard of grizzled grey!
Ngombesazi is just the same . . . he was one of the few that came,
Took him wives, and settled him down, and lingers here to-day.

* * * *

If Juma starts with a caravan, there's money to be paid—
Duty on rubber, duty on tusks, everything checked and weighed!
A rule for this and a rule for that (and trust the Police to have them pat!)
Why, if a man but kills his wife, a terrible fuss is made!

We're tucked away in a heathen tribe of "shenzi" dogs forsworn,
With never a mosque or a minaret where the muezzin chants at dawn—
Chief of a tribe of carrion-crows, with poisonous huts in filthy rows.
By Beard of the Prophet, Abdullah may rue the day that he was born!

THE CROCODILE KINGS

HEMMED about by swamp and bushland, barriered
by mighty lakes
Dwelt the Benangandu Chieftains in their tangled,
matted brakes—
Autocrats who swayed their peoples not by knife
or fire alone,
Not alone by mutilation or the sacrificial stone,
But in virtue of their Kingship—Chieftains to the
very bone.

Capped in scarlet parrots' feathers, draped in vesture
wild and weird,
Beaded, bangled, and barbaric, reverenced and
rudely feared,
Lords of life and limb unquestioned, Kings of Crop
and Kings of Clan,
Swayed they thus their forest silence on the old,
primæval plan
Till the White Men came among them, and the
new regime began.

(Scorn we not such savage kingdoms! It is easy to deride
Setting up our modern standards, arrogant in modern pride—
Education?—sanitation?—had they these and all the rest?
Maybe not! . . . but dare we, therefore, claim our system as the best
When, through ages long-forgotten, Chieftainship has stood the test?)

Picture, say, the Chief at sunset, rising from his judgment-seat
Where, in front, the men are sitting, women kneeling at his feet—
Mark the councils bow before him, he the only man erect—
Wachilolo—City Guardians—Wakabiro, bell-bedecked—
Lords of Districts—Lords of Frontiers, and a host of the elect.

Old and cramped, and very weary, he has sat there since the dawn,
Disentangled many a lawsuit, punished many a wife forsworn,

Dealt with crops, and tithe and tribute, set his seal
on vested right,
Thrown out forays to his borders, armies to enforce
his might
Earned, at least, the peace of sunset, and the silence
of the night.

* * * *

Tyrant? . . . Yes, no doubt in measure—cruel, and
greedy of his sway
(Since his people scorn the chicken, but make
gods of beasts of prey!)
Had he faltered once, or wavered, passed he swiftly,
stiff and cold
To the groves of sad Mwaruli, haunted by the Kings
of old—
He who rules a savage nation must a savage rule
uphold.

THE PRICE OF EMPIRE

WHAT will it look like when you're gone?
Your flowers shall be just the same,
I'll give them water in your name
At dawn and sunset, Marion . . .
I'll watch your roses day by day
The weary while that you're away.

Can you believe it? that, to-night,
You look your last upon the scene:
Our garden—maze of spangled green
That we designed, with hearts alight,
Ten years ago? . . . Look where we set
That crescent bed of mignonette.

Ten years ago! But years are winged
In these dim, silent, heathen lands—
This garden, moulded by our hands,
Set with rich blossoms, and beringed
With trim-cut fences could not lie—
It warned us how the years flew by.

At first—we laughed, you know, and said,
"What do we want but just ourselves—
A garden for the flower-elves,
And books, perhaps, when daylight's dead . . .
So, we'll be happy as the day
Though London Town is years away."

And then—the child came, and we knew
Our world had held a void before,
And day by day we massed a store
Of nursery legends, and we grew
To feel that here was Paradise . . .
And now—to-night—we pay the price.

A price wrung out in drops of blood,
Paid by the woman and the man
On the far Empire-edge, who plan
Their lives together . . . and find the flood
Of Fate's too strong . . . and, for the child,
Must face their parting in the wild.

The child, who drew us closer still,
Who made our life a perfect whole,
Who dowered our garden with a soul,
Who bent us, smiling, to his will—
His are the hands to break the spell
And turn our Paradise to Hell!

* * * *

Sweet though they be, these heathen lands,
They cannot rear the White Man's child,
Heir to the Ages, running wild
In tangled bush and burning sand . . .
We owe them much—ten years of joy—
But—they hold nothing for the boy!

(Look! The young moon slips up the sky
Clear-cut and clean—no hint of rain—
Your three-weeks' journey to the train
Should be propitious—cool, and dry.
When the first rains begin, you'll be
A week or more upon the sea.)

* * * *

Well! Let's go in! it's getting late,
And I've a thousand things to do
To-morrow morning . . . we must screw
A top-lid on the silver crate . . .
And then, those trunks of his, you know . . .
Ah God! . . . That you should have to go. . . .

RHODES'S DREAM

Up from the Cape where the wild seas thunder,
Over the Falls, where a haze of spray
Keeps the North and the South asunder,
Swings she swift on her headlong way—
Speeding tireless, night and day,
Past the Lakes in their magic chain,
Waking the Desert to wide-eyed wonder,
Racketing, rocketing, roars the Train.

A silver wedge in the bushland spaces
Cleaving North through a heathen land,
Stamping the wild with the White Man's traces,
Trimming the rough for the Master Hand,
Girdling earth with a magic band,
Lighting the night with a steady gleam,
Meeting dawn in the far-off places,
These are the fruits of Rhodes's Dream!

Beasts scared off from the pools at dawning
Grunt and growl as she rumbles by,
Forest-folk in the misty morning
Gaze aghast ere they turn to fly—
Trim and true is each bolt and tie,
Trestle and culvert snugly laid,
(Now and again at the whistle's warning
Elephants trumpet down the glade).

"Cape to Cairo!—Steamer to Steamer!
Rail and wire from South to North. . . ."
Men guffawed at the Master Schemer,
Fools waxed loud in their foolish wrath . . .
But the project held, and the words went forth,
Sister-nations hurried to aid,
Stung by the dream of a dumb, dead Dreamer,
Men toiled on till the rails were laid.

Out of the South where the ships are plying,
Into the clutch of the parched Karroo,
Past the crags where his bones are lying
Under their slab on the World's wide View . . .
'Tis none so long since the world was new
And the mammoth moved in eternal snows,
But the dream he dreamed when he lay a-dying
Bids to come true. And perhaps—he knows.

NIGER, SED PULCHERRIMUS

I CAUGHT him raw, and very dense,
Unregistered by any owner,
Entirely devoid of sense,
Was this Mashona.

To teach his "young idea" to shoot,
I blush to say I sometimes hit him;
I've clothed him in a canvas suit
Which doesn't fit him.

I've learnt his speech, his clicks and gasps,
And sometimes I essay a parley,
But all his understanding grasps
Is "futi mali."

Breathes there a youth with soul so dead?
Breathes there a nigger any denser?
Decidedly he's not been bred
To "Umsebenza."

He's never yet been wide awake,
(Or if he was I failed to "spot" him);
I think God made him by mistake:
And then forgot him.

He cannot learn to fold my suits,
He will put sheets outside the blanket;
I gave him stuff to clean my boots,
Of course, he drank it.

His notions are distinctly crude
Of rights of "meum" and "tuum";
To men at large his attitude
Is just—to do 'em.

Boys will be boys—I'm not surprised
That this one should be sometimes frisky,
But still, he's not been authorized
To drink my whisky.

In brief he riles me—on the whole
This nigger I would gladly smother,
And yet, they say, he has a soul,
And is—my Brother!

May God preserve me, all the same,
From such a family connection,
I've no desire to press the claim
In this direction!

A SONG OF PRAISE

(Bulawayo, 1906)

We are the Salt of the Earth! We are the Chosen Elect!
We are the Few who have worried things through,
Let us with garlands be decked.
Here's to the snuffy-faced Stiff!
Here's to the old Pioneer!
Here's to the crowd who can chuckle aloud
At the shadowy mention of Beer!

Our bills may be heavy and long, our pockets be empty of tin,
That's nothing to do with myself or with you
Provided we never go in.
Here's to the Broke-to-the World,
Let him be sung by the bards,
Ay coming it strong, he may worry along,
And live by the signing of cards.

"Mali," Mosquitoes, and Mud—they are the plagues
of our life,
The Heathen, the Heat and the prices of meat
Are matters that lead us to strife.
We growl at the want of Police,
We rail at the prices of Drink,
But, with drinks that were free, and more B.S.A.P.,
We'd bump up against it, I think.

What of the taxes we pay? What of the thirty per
cent?
So long as we find a landlord inclined
To wink at our dodging the rent.
Here's to the down-trodden Poor!
Here's to the Weak and Oppressed!
For the Gods will be good in the matter of food,
And the deuce will look after the rest.

POINTS OF VIEW

I

SHALL we instruct the savage?
Ah, my brothers, take heed,
Lest we ruin and ravage
A Soul in its tender need.

Teach him his soul's salvation,
Teach him to read and write,
To solve the subtle equation
Black plus black equals white.

He is an infant, merely
Ignorant—there's the rub—
Yours very sincerely,
Timothy Thumpatub.

II

What? Should we teach the nigger?
Teach him sebenza—Yes!
Teach him to write and figure?
Absolute rot, I guess!

Teach him his right position,
Teach him to earn his bread,
And, if he starts sedition,
Hammer him over the head!

Niggers ain't worth a d——n, sir,
Their soul's a mighty big If!—
And so, to conclude—I am, sir,
Yours (signed) Solomon Stiff.

III

Should we instruct the heathen?
Sir, such a question hurts!
What do you think's the reason
I make him collars and shirts?

Why do I send him Bibles?
Why do I knit him socks?
Sir, your remarks are libels,
And your suggestion shocks.

Natives are sadly harried—
I weep for them, one and all—
Yours, in disgust—"Unmarried,"
Care of Exeter Hall.

IV

Funa fundisa Black Boy ?
    Longili ! Very much mush' !
Boss chela mina slack boy,
    Boss niga mina push.

If mina azi figure,
    Learn how to read and write,
Me become mushle nigger,
    Me very much alright.

If mina azi bara
    Me writee pass for drink—
(Mr.) Mafuta Mompara,
    Care of the Warder, Clink.

"RATION B"

(The Government ration allowed to Destitute British Subjects)

PEPPER and salt and a twist of tea,
Flour, a couple of pounds or less,
And a tin of beef—that's Ration B,
The price of the D.B.S.

* * * *

A White Man's white, and a nigger's black,
And I've heard of kids that are café-au-lait,
But the man that's down on the bone of his back
Is a nasty kind of grey.

He isn't fish and he isn't fowl . . .
Niggers grin when he shambles by—
The parson-man with the shaven jowl
Blinks with a furtive eye.

Beautiful ladies twitch their skirts
Thinking he *must* be drunk, I guess—
I don't suppose they reckon it hurts
The pride of the D.B.S.

I'm talking now of the things I *know*,
Things I've seen as I've passed along
Pacing Africa to and fro
Ever since things went wrong.

I'm not a drunkard, funny enough—
I buried a wife on the Other Side
(Game right through—but she cut up rough
The year the youngster died).

I've known the nights in a native kraal,
Rats and bugs and a host of fleas—
Tired and sick and sorry and all . . .
And far worse things than these!

Many a black man's done me proud,
Set me down to a steaming mess
And I've starved in the thick of a Europe crowd,
Being only a D.B.S.!

I've seen a White Man togged to the nines
Look me up and then look me down,
And wink a jibe to his heathen swines
In a so-called Christian town.

Once on a time, in the Far Away,
I could have bought him, body and soul,
Seen him cringe for his weekly pay,
Touch his hat for a dole.

Now—the pendulum's swung too wide,
Swung me out of my own estate—
Who cares tuppence what may betide
The Man Who Didn't Run Straight?

"Give him another chance," you say?
"Help him straighten the coil he laid?"
Devil a bit, kind sir! *Not they!*
"Let him lie on the bed he made!"

"Sit on his head and hold him down!"
—That's the Good Samaritan touch!
"Hound him out of a decent town!
"Give him a chance? NOT MUCH!"

"Set him square on the Northern track—
Give him a gun and his Ration B—
Pray to God he never comes back . . . !"
That's what they did to me.

* * * *

Pepper and salt, and a twist of tea,
Flour a couple of pounds or less . . .
But if charity's wanting in Ration B,
God help the D.B.S. !

TO MOTHER AFRICA

After Ten Years

I was pretty young and foolish when I came,
The things I knew were fairly few and small—
I was eaten up with shame, but you took me just
the same,
And you taught me, Mother Africa, to try and play
the game
As men play it out beyond the City Wall.

I'd been cosseted and petted in the past—
I was frightened at the silence in the wild,
But your net was neatly cast,
And you gripped and held me fast,
And I thank you, Mother Africa! I thank you, at
the last
For the trouble that you've taken with your child.

There are millions who know nothing of your spell,
And revile you for your cruelty and pain—
"Out in Africa," they say,
"Men are lost and thrown away."
We know better, Mother Africa! your children come to stay,
And they never scale the City Wall again!

I will grant them, there is sorrow in your school,
There is agony, and misery, and death—
And a man is but your tool,
Be he genius or a fool,
Yet no matter, Mother Africa! we glory in your rule,
For you've saved us from the fetid City breath.

In ten long years I've learned to love the chain
(Though, sometimes, every fetter's bound to gall),
Though you've tutored me in pain,
If God grant me ten again,
You shall have them, Mother Africa, so long as you remain
Untrammelled, and outside the City Wall.

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